

# JUNK FOOD INJUNCTION

2007 SPRING EDITION



The  
Cancer  
Council  
New South Wales

## MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORS

With the first round of the Children's Television Standards review underway, there have been some wins for those advocating stronger regulations for TV advertising to children.

This edition of Junk Food Injunction highlights the overwhelming community support for this public health issue and the progress made so far. Also in this issue, we feature the Parents Jury's 'winners' for the worst TV ads, a list of the top websites for information on children's nutrition and physical activity, and as always there is a healthy child-friendly recipe to try.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

Following this initial public consultation period, the Australian Communications and Media Authority will be making recommendations and redrafting the Children's Television Standards. These new standards will again be open for public consultation before the final regulations are produced. The current projection is for the complete review to be finalised by mid-2008. Stay tuned to Junk Food Injunction for further progress.

## ROUND ONE: PUBLIC HEALTH ADVOCATES VS. FOOD ADVERTISERS

In August, the Australian Communications and Media Authority accepted public submissions for their review of the Children's Television Standards, the regulations governing TV advertising to children. The Australian Communications and Media Authority received a total of 77 submissions; 40 of which had a public health focus, 20 from the food and advertising industries, and 17 submissions regarding issues other than food advertising. On the basis of these counts alone, those advocating for a reduction in unhealthy food advertising to children are winning, 2:1!

Further, public health groups provided a unified front, with more than 70% of their submissions either adapting The Coalition on Food Advertising to Children's submission template or supporting The Coalition on Food Advertising to Children's position, to restrict unhealthy food advertising during broadcasting periods when high numbers of children are watching TV.

As expected, food and advertising industry submissions focused on their belief that self-regulation of TV advertising was sufficient, and that any loss in advertising revenue would impact on the quality of children's programming. These arguments are clearly at odds with current research, which indicates that industry regulation is ineffective and has been likened to 'the fox guarding the hen house'. In addition, many children's programs that are currently aired on TV are repeated series, with the number of original programs in decline, even in the presence of high levels of food advertising. Further, government funding from the Film Finance Corporation is a key contributor to children's programming.

Incongruously, in their own submission the Australian Association of National Advertisers tagged public health advocates as "extreme minority/self interest groups". It is ironic that an advertising body formed to serve the interests of advertisers, should label public health advocates as being a 'self-interest' group. Rather these advocacy groups represent concerned parents, schools and health workers who are keen to reduce children's exposure to the powerful marketing of unhealthy food. Also, with 20,521-signed postcards (see article on page 2), this support is clearly not from a 'minority'.

To read these submissions go to:

[http://www.acma.gov.au/WEB/STANDARD/pc=PC\\_310492](http://www.acma.gov.au/WEB/STANDARD/pc=PC_310492)

## MOVE OVER FOOD MARKETERS, POSTCARDS COMING THROUGH!

To coincide with the Australian Communications and Media Authority's review of the Children's Television Standards, The Cancer Council NSW ran a postcard advocacy campaign on behalf of The Coalition on Food Advertising to Children. This initiative aimed to demonstrate community support for stronger regulations on TV food advertising to children.

Thanks to the great support that we received, a total of 20,521 postcards were collected. This is truly an amazing effort, with many dedicated individuals and groups instrumental in generating support for this campaign.



The Chair of The Coalition on Food Advertising to Children and other members of The Cancer Council NSW, together with concerned parents, delivered all of these signed postcards to (a very amazed) Australian Communications and Media Authority. Politicians have also been informed about the levels of support in their local electorates for the campaign.

The huge scale, and support for this campaign has also helped to generate a lot of media, which has further raised the profile of this important issue in the public arena.

## HEALTH HALO A MARKETING MANOEUVRE FOR FAST FOOD?

With increasing public attention to the issue of obesity and poor nutrition, many food manufacturers and fast food chains are jumping on the bandwagon of labelling their products as low fat, low salt or healthier, and using these initiatives as key public relations messages.

However, a recent review cast doubt in the effectiveness of changing fast food menus on public health. A recent review of four studies that was published in the Journal of Consumer Research in October, found that when a fast food product is labelled as 'healthy', consumers underestimate the number of kilojoules in the meal, and will select side orders, drinks and desserts that contain more kilojoules. Therefore it appears that people compensate for their healthier meal by purchasing more unhealthy extras.



This means fast food chains stand to increase sales and public standing from such shrewd marketing moves, while still increasing the consumption of unhealthy options.

One recent example of this is when McDonalds introduced its "Tick-approved meals" with a massive accompanying promotional campaign spanning TV, radio and print media. Recent data from the National Heart Foundation shows that 19% of consumers are switching to Tick approved meals at McDonalds. However, these changes could be nothing more than a PR halo if customers are teaming their healthier meals with unhealthy extras or eat fast food meals more often than they otherwise might.

## PARENTS HAND DOWN VERDICT TO FOOD ADVERTISERS

The Parents Jury is a web-based forum for parents, which focuses on improving children's food and physical activity environments. A key focus of this group is in advocating for a reduction in unhealthy food marketing to children. The annual 'Children's TV Food Advertising Awards' both names and shames food manufacturers who have unscrupulously marketed their unhealthy food products to children, and also credits those manufacturers of healthy foods who have promoted healthy eating to children.



This year the TV Food Advertising Awards were held in Melbourne in October, with a great turn out of parents, public health spokespeople and media. There were three award categories:

- **The Pester Power Award**, given to the food advertisement that most provokes children to pester their parents for the product.
- **The Smoke and Mirrors Award**, where a product is misleadingly portrayed as healthy, by focusing on only the more favourable nutritional attributes while completely ignoring any negative ones.
- **The Parent's Choice Award**, given to the best advertisement that promotes healthy food.

The 'winner' of the undesirable Pester Power award was McDonald's for their Spongebob Squarepants Happy Meal ad; and Kellogg's received the Smoke and Mirrors Awards for their Coco Pops Coco Rocks ad. McDonald's was awarded this title as the toys included with their Happy Meals encourage children to badger parents to purchase the product. Changing these toys regularly gives children renewed reasons to re-visit McDonalds. Kellogg's promote their Coco Pops Coco Rocks as being made from whole grains, while ignoring their high sugar content. Although they are an improvement on regular Coco Pops, the sugar content is still too high, meaning that it is not suitable for eating every day.

This year Woolworths took home the Parent's Choice Award for their Fresh Fruit Kids ads. These ads promoted fresh fruit in fun and interesting ways to children. Woolworth's have also launched a website to accompany these TV ads, which also focuses on presenting healthy food to children:

(<http://www.woolworths.com.au/kidscorner/>).

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The message is loud and clear. Parents are fed up having to contend with McDonalds enticing their children to want its food by using free toy giveaways. Parents have enough pressures to deal with these days without this kind of manipulation.

*Professor Boyd Swinburn, Deakin University*

### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

If you're a parent or guardian, become a member of the Parents Jury; get your voice heard and participate in other advocacy activities to improve children's food and physical activity environments. Visit <http://www.parentsjury.org.au/> today

## In a nutshell

Public health submissions for the review of the Children's Television Standards outweighed those from food and advertising industries, 2:1.

A total of 20,521-signed postcards were collected to show public support for stronger TV food advertising regulations for children.

Advertisements for McDonald's Happy Meals and Kellogg's Coco Pops Coco Rocks deemed worst offenders by parents

## Real kids' food: Healthy Recipes

### Vegetarian Pizza Muffins

Serves 4

#### Ingredients:

- 4 English Muffins, halved
- ½ cup tomato paste or salsa
- ½ cup grated low fat cheese
- ½ large red capsicum, finely sliced
- 8 button mushrooms, sliced
- 1 small red onion, finely sliced
- 1 tablespoon drained tiny capers

#### Method:

1. Preheat oven to 200 degrees (fan forced).
2. Place muffins on tray and spread with tomato paste or salsa.
3. Sprinkle low fat cheese over each muffin and top each with capsicum, button mushrooms, red onion and capers.
4. Bake in hot oven for 10 minutes or until browned.
5. Serve immediately.

## Top 10 websites to visit for healthy UNBRANDED information for kids

It is widely known that the Commonwealth government do not support stronger restrictions on food marketing to children, with the Health Minister Tony Abbott vehemently opposing further regulation; even provoking outrage from public health groups with thoughtless comments such as telling parents "If you don't like the advertising on television, switch it off, simple as that".

Regardless of this seemingly pro-industry stance, we were still shocked and concerned that the Commonwealth government itself is propagating marketing via their own websites. On the government's Australian Sports Commission website ([http://www.ausport.gov.au/junior/parents/healthymessages\\_health.asp](http://www.ausport.gov.au/junior/parents/healthymessages_health.asp)), they list the Nestle website as a good source of information for nutrition information for children, with Nestle

a commercial sponsor of the Australian Institute of Sport. Surely the government could have included more appropriate sources of information; one that was not overwrought with branded promotions. We've compiled a list of what we consider to be the top unbranded websites for information of children's nutrition and health. Take a look.

#### 1. **Good for Kids Good for Life:**

<http://www.goodforkids.nsw.gov.au/>

The new NSW Health website that gives practical information on child nutrition and physical activity for parents, carers and the wider community.

#### 2. **CHOICE Food for Kids:**

<http://www.choicefoodforkids.com.au/>

This site provides an assessment of the nutritional quality of a range of popular children's foods.

#### 3. **NSW Healthy Kids:**

<http://www.healthykids.nsw.gov.au/>

Gives five tips steps for healthy kids

#### 4. **Raising Children Network:**

<http://raisingchildren.net.au/>

The Australian Parenting Website with information for children of all ages.

#### 5. **Fresh for Kids:**

<http://www.freshforkids.com.au/>

A child friendly website promoting fruit and vegetables.

#### 6. **Nutrition Australia:**

<http://www.nutritionaustralia.org/>

Comprehensive food and nutrition information for all ages.

#### 7. **NSW Sport and Recreation:**

<http://www.dsr.nsw.gov.au/>

Find out about fun activities for children

#### 8. **Go for Your Life:**

<http://www.goforyourlife.vic.gov.au/>

Healthy eating and active living for children

#### 9. **Go for 2 & 5:**

<http://www.healthyactive.gov.au/internet/healthyactive/publishing.nsf/Content/about>

For information about the Go for 2 & 5 fruit and vegetable campaign and information on how to increase your fruit and vegetable intake.

#### 10. **The Australian Guide to Healthy Eating:**

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/health-pubhlth-strateg-food-guide-index.htm>

A nationally recognised food guide for Australians.

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Publisher: **The Cancer Council NSW**

ISSN: 1834 - 3767 CAN/06/12B

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